

DO MUSICIANS NEED IDEAS?



PAUL WELLS doesn't mind being original in his discussion of this problem. His piano-playing is a complete illustration of the fact that a man must do some thinking nowadays if he is to keep out of the rush of the conventional. And his piano compositions are musical arguments without words.



VIGGO KIHl, pianist and pedagog, is not indignant over the allegation that musicians do not need to incorporate ideas into their music. In fact he clearly shows by the inductive method that nothing but ideas can save music from becoming obsolete.



STUDENT of several languages, versed in philosophy and law, himself a composer, teacher of violin and conductor, Luigi Von Kunits answers the question in a purely unimpassioned way. His regular articles in the Musical Journal, of which he is editor, have already stamped him as a musician who thinks.



SIGNOR CARBONI teaches opera and singing, but he thinks independently. He has not yet mastered the English language—French is his idiom—but his ideas have been transcribed into fair English by somebody else. Music is a universal language. Signor Carboni talks it.



RUTHVEN McDONALD, born a basso-cantante, in Ruthven, Ont., one of the most popular artists in the Chataqua circuit and just as popular in his home country as abroad, makes the subject personal to himself. If ever you hear "Mac" talk, you recognize the fact that he gets much joy out of other things than music.



PETER C. KENNEDY, musical director of the Canadian Academy, has had experience enough from several angles of music to mean what he says when he claims that musicians really need ideas—and have them—. Besides teaching piano, he plays an organ in a Kirk, conducts a choir, and sometimes a woman's choral society.

NO such question would be asked if a large number of people were not in the habit of assuming that the stock-in-trade of musicians is Emotion, a Sensation that has nothing to do with Intellect or Ideas. The question was put to a number of competent Canadian musicians by the Music Editor of this paper. Some of the answers are given below. That there is considerable variety in the results must be taken as a proof that musicians do really think. The form of the query was not exactly obvious to all of them. One critical artist wanted to know—"Do you mean that in my work I must give expression to concrete ideas? If so, I unhesitatingly answer, 'No,' I do no such thing. My business is to interpret ideas which are not concrete." And he is right. What we mean is, Does a musician, whether he is a composer, a singer, a player or a pedagog, need to do anything more than produce sounds of a more or less agreeable character to please other people, involving, of

course, enough intellectual effort to master notation, theory, harmony, counterpoint, etc.? If so, the musician has no need to study literature, painting or philosophy. All he needs is to put a nice label on the emotion intended to be conveyed by a piece of instrumental music and see that the listener gets it. In the case of songs it's only a word now and again that counts anyway; and in opera it really doesn't matter about the words at all. So far as teaching goes, all the intellect necessary is to convince a pupil that no other teacher can do so well for her particular case, and to get the money.

All this and much more is the baneful result, once we assent to the axiom that Musical Art is a Matter of Feeling which has nothing to do with Ideas. How sadly the common notion about musicians is in error may be judged by the articles below, all differing in point of attack, but all agreeing in the general principle, that when music divorces itself from brains it's—Good-Bye to Real Art.

Ideas? Most Decidedly

THE great mistake made by many people, including, perhaps, the critic who has said that artists do not need brains nor need to express ideas, is in believing that anyone who has acquired a technical skill is therefore an artist. It is true, I believe, that almost anyone, without much brains, can, if he keeps at it long enough, acquire sufficient technical ability to enable him to go before the critics; but the creation of an art expression springs from things much beyond all that.

Art is the symbol of the workings of the conscious and sub-conscious mind of the artist, and every work of art is an autobiography, or a page therefrom, of the artist. It therefore follows without a doubt that the wider afield his mental excursions have been and the more individually he expresses his ideas of what has come to pass to him, the more interesting and illumined his work becomes.

Art is not the senseless emotional outpouring of some unfortunate heaven-sent individual, as some other of our friends may think. Rather it is the glorification of all those yearnings for beautiful things which lie hidden within all of us, by some fortunate individual whose finely wrought mind is receptive to all those nebulous impressions, thereafter transfusing and transforming them into a conscious expression.

Music being the most elusive, the most fleeting, the most abstract thing in all the world, must surely be best imagined by a mind with many delicate wings.

Emotion is indivisible from art, in fact is the kernel of expression; but emotion in itself alone is too crude and embryo a thing, and unnurtured by taste and mental balance is apt to offend our sensibilities; and culture and wide interests breed good taste and mental balance.

PAUL WELLS.

Intellect Out-Lives Emotion

VIGGO KIHl comes at the question from the historical angle. His answer to the problem demands the use of constant intellectual effort on the part of the interpreting musician, if he is to convey the message of music, which has taken big, constructive intellects to produce.

Just as the finest types of human beings, he says, seem to be those in which culture of mind and culture of heart equal each other, so in music and in other arts those works rank highest and survive the longest, in which great emotional inspiration has been ennobled, by an equally great intellectual conception of how best to express it.

Beethoven's sketch books show how he filed and altered apparently in the first instance beautiful things to fit into the general scheme he had in

mind; and how greatly it was improved when he had brought his searching intellect to bear on it. If one examines the finest works of those composers universally acknowledged as the greatest, like Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Wagner, and even Chopin, one will find that the reason for their survival rests as much on the beautiful, highly-logical and yet original way of stating their musical thoughts, as on the emotional appeal of the themes themselves.

Many of what for want of a better term I will call the second greatest, had wonderful musical feeling and beauty of melody (Schubert, Schumann, Tchaikovsky, Rubinstein, and the best of Italian and French operatic composers), and still in the general estimation they do not wear as well, owing, in my mind, to the fact that their intellectual power was not quite on a par with their musical inspiration. That is, their works do not show the same beauty, finality and logic of design, all of which is an outcome of intellect.

Great men in practical life, often owing to their superior intellect, see possibilities which are not apparent to the ordinary observer; just as Mozart, in the overture to the Magic Flute, and the finale of the Jupiter symphony, was able to build immortal edifices, with the very same themes used by Clementi and Hummel, in pianoforte sonatas now long forgotten.

The first movement of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and Mendelssohn's Hebrides Overture, the one stirring, the other highly poetic in its appeal, are also, to a great extent, the outcome of the intellect inasmuch as both of them are built on a short motif, in the one instance four, and the other seven notes.

What applies to composition applies equally to interpretation, as an artist unable himself fully to appreciate the intellectual workmanship of a great composition could not reasonably be expected to recreate it in its full meaning and significance.

VIGGO KIHl.

Had Great Masters No Brains?

Editor, Canadian Courier:

IN response to your letter query of October 10th, relative to the capacity of musicians to formulate and give expression to ideas through the medium of their work, what follows may serve to indicate my views, while at the same time helping, I trust, to correct any erroneous impression on the subject that may meantime appear to exist.

It is a self-evident fact that there is a vast difference between the brain of an artist and that of a man of business. The brain cells of the artist have been formed for art conceptions, and have been further developed along the same lines. De l'idée naît la sensation. Ideas beget sensations (emotions) and it is the overwhelming flood of ideas with which the composer and the interpreter deluge the public that the latter finally absorb and reproduce.